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SUBJECT: MOROCCO: 2008 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

REF: A. STATE 124815

[B](#). STATE 124033

[C](#). STATE 120019

RABAT 00001180 001.2 OF 005

[1](#). (SBU) In response to Ref C request, this cable constitutes Embassy Morocco's draft submission for the 2008 Country Reports on Terrorism (see paragraphs below). The report is also being uploaded to Diplopedia. The Embassy Morocco point of contact for this report is David O'Connor (O'ConnorDR@State.gov).

[2](#). (U) Summary: There were no terrorist attacks in Morocco in 2008, and no large-scale damages since the Casablanca bombings of 2003. The disruption of relatively small and isolated Salafi Jihadist-inspired groups this year points to the need for continued vigilance, but the GOM's CT efforts have done a good job of minimizing the threat. Morocco pursues a comprehensive CT approach that emphasizes vigilant security measures, including international cooperation, and counter-radicalization policies. The disruptions of terrorist cells in Morocco are testament to the rejection of them by the Moroccan public and to the competence of Morocco's security services. The main external terrorism threat to Morocco is the Algeria and Mali-based al-Qa,ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb terrorist group, along with concerns about Moroccan emigres radicalized in Europe. The Government of Morocco (GOM) has been stalwart in its partnership with the U.S. to combat terrorism since the 9/11 attacks. End Summary.

[3](#). (U) Internal Threat: There were no terrorist attacks in Morocco in 2008, and no large-scale damages since the Casablanca bombings of 2003. Characteristics of groups disrupted by Moroccan authorities, however, support previous analysis that Morocco's threat of terrorist attack continues to stem from the existence of numerous small "grassroots" Salafi Jihadist-inspired groups. These groups, sometimes referred collectively as adherents to Moroccan Salafia Jihadia ideology (a catch-all term used by Moroccan authorities to describe fundamentalist teachings originally emanating from the eastern Arab world), remain, isolated from one another, small in size -- less than 50 individuals -- and tactically limited. Morocco has no known safe haven areas within its borders for terrorism and there has been no known effort by Moroccan terrorist groups to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

[4](#). (U) External Threat: In terms of Moroccan terrorists receiving external support, the Algeria and Mali-based al-Qa,ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) terrorist group represents the principle threat, according to Moroccan authorities, although others exist. There are reports of considerable numbers of Moroccans going to

northern Mali and Algeria to receive training from AQIM elements with some returning to Morocco and others traveling to Iraq to conduct terrorist attacks. Although AQIM has been unable to support a successful terrorist attack in Morocco to date, Moroccan authorities remain concerned about the inspiration and knowledge transfer that AQIM may be providing to Moroccan Salafi Jihadists. In 2008, AQIM repeatedly tried to incite Moroccans to commit violence against their government through website propaganda. Similar propaganda efforts by the Pakistan-based al-Qa,ida network also continued in 2008. Foreign terrorist websites have singled out for criticism royal rule itself, and have also complained about the Spanish enclaves, a position which, however, is similar to GOM,s. The GOM also remains concerned about numbers of veteran Moroccan jihadists returning from Iraq to propagate and conduct terrorist attacks at home. While overall numbers of Moroccans fighting in Iraq are difficult to confirm, some press reporting puts the number at several hundred. A further cause of concern is Moroccans who were radicalized during their stays in Western Europe, such as those connected with the 2004 Madrid train bombings.

15. (SBU) Morocco,s Counterterrorism Efforts: The GOM is pursuing a comprehensive CT approach that, building on popular rejection of terrorism, emphasizes neutralizing existing terrorist cells, through traditional law enforcement and pre-emptive security measures, and preventing terrorist recruitment through comprehensive counter-radicalization policies. In 2008, Rabat continued to aggressively target and dismantle terrorist cells within the Kingdom by leveraging policing techniques, coordinating and focusing the security services, and expanding and bolstering regional CT partnerships. These efforts resulted in the neutralization of numerous Salafia Jihadia-inspired terrorist groups the most prominent of which are as follows.

RABAT 00001180 002.2 OF 005

-- In February 2008, Moroccan authorities arrested a 36-person strong terrorist network in the cities of Nador, Rabat, Marakesh and Casablanca. In addition to attack plotting against Moroccan and Western targets, group leader and de facto double-agent Moroccan-Belgium Abdelkader Belliraj, now in Moroccan custody, is suspected of participating in a bank robbery and half a dozen assassinations in Europe and smuggling arms into Morocco.

-- In May, an 11-member terrorist group plotting attacks in Morocco and Belgium was dismantled in Belgium.

-- In July, the security services arrested, in various cities, 35 members of a terrorist network specializing in the recruitment of volunteers for Iraq.

-- In August, another 15-person network calling itself Fath al-Andalus was reportedly disbanded in Laayoune, Western Sahara and various cities in Morocco. The group was allegedly planning bombing attacks against United Nations peacekeeping forces in Western Sahara and tourists sites in Morocco.

-- In December, authorities reportedly arrested five members of a terrorist cell in the northeastern Moroccan city of Berkane, along with nine other group members in other cities, who were allegedly preparing to rob banks in order to acquire arms for terrorist acts.

16. (U) In addition to traditional security measures, Morocco's King Mohammed VI has promoted significant efforts to reduce extremism and dissuade individuals from becoming radicalized. The vast majority of Moroccans are devout Sunni Muslims who practice the Malikite rite, a school of Islam that emphasizes moderation, tolerance, and mediation. Their popular practice has proven to be resistant to the spread of radical ideology and terrorism in Morocco. Ordinary citizens providing tips to Moroccan security authorities have been

instrumental in detecting many terrorist groups in Morocco, according to Interior Ministry sources.

¶7. (U) The King, as head of state and as the country's foremost religious leader (holding the title of "Commander of the Faithful"), has led the preventative aspects of Morocco's CT effort by unambiguously condemning terrorism and those who espouse it. Under the king's guidance, Morocco has undertaken two phases of reform to "restructure the religious sector" to preserve Morocco's spiritual security. After the 2003 Casablanca bombings, Morocco steadily increased attention to and focused on upgrading places of worship, modernization of the teaching of Islam, and strengthening the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs. In September 2008, a radical cleric issued a highly inflammatory fatwa (religious opinion) that asserted the validity of marriage of girls, as young as nine-years old. Moroccan authorities responded aggressively by discrediting Sheikh Mohamed Ben Abderrahman Al Maghraoui, previously known for his fundamentalist and eastern-inspired views, closing down approximately 60 Koranic schools under his supervision, and initiating an official inquiry into his competence. In addition, the public prosecutor's office initiated a criminal case against him for encouraging pedophilia. The Council of Ulemas, Morocco's highest religious body, was charged by the King, who is its leader, to "combat the hoaxes peddled by proponents of extremism," and to ensure the safeguarding of Morocco's tolerant Sunni Islam identity.

¶8. (U) After this event and in a speech to the Higher Council of Ulema in late September, the King announced his "proximity strategy," calling for the rehabilitation of 3,180 mosques, the training of 33,000 imams, and the creation of additional local Councils of Ulema, increasing the number of regional councils from 30 to 70 across Morocco, to help propagate a culture of religious tolerance and confront extremism. The pioneering experiment, begun in 2007, of training and using women as spiritual guides continued this year. The GOM has also continued efforts this year to revive the once widespread practice of Sufi Islam, a practice focused on the mystical and spiritual aspects of Islam, and traditional practices in Morocco to counter the growing influence of "eastern Islam," among marginalized poor, though this effort has been criticized, according to press reports, by some religious commentators.

¶9. (U) As an external part of the king's new religious policy, in October the GOM invited Moroccan-born imams from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Sweden for religious

RABAT 00001180 003.2 OF 005

instruction in Morocco aimed at reinforcing the precepts of moderate Islam in local mosques in order to combat extremism, particularly among youth. The GOM also sent 167 Moroccan imams to Europe, 31 to Belgium alone, during Ramadan this year to deliver the same message to Moroccan expatriates. Although the GOM has been sending preachers to Europe for years, this latest batch were specifically selected to address extremism and fanaticism. In addition, the Moroccan Council of Ulemas will soon create a department that will watch over the more than 3 million Moroccans, i.e., 10% of the total population of Morocco, whose situation as immigrants in Europe is seen as making them particularly vulnerable to extremism.

-- The GOM, and frequently the King himself, regularly and strongly condemns terrorist acts, wherever they occur. The King has been particularly articulate in the wake of attacks in neighboring Algeria, in expressions of sympathy for, and solidarity with, foreign governments and with the victims.

¶10. (U) Political Developments: The King and his government continue to be strong supporters of Middle East peace. In addition to being a leading advocate of inter-religious tolerance, the King has also been a vocal supporter of the Palestinian people. (Note: The perceived injustice faced by

the Palestinian people is cited by Moroccan officials as the single greatest radicalizing element among Moroccan extremists.) Although the Parliament continues to remain in need of strengthening and reform, it has nonetheless provided a forum for airing moderate Islamist-inspired views in a political setting, offering a counter-example to Salafi Jihadist rhetoric. The conservative Party of Justice and Development is the second largest political party in the Moroccan Parliament.

¶11. (U) Economic Developments: In 2008, the GOM continued to implement internal reforms aimed at ameliorating socio-economic factors that create conditions which can contribute to individuals being attracted to extremism. The National Initiative for Human Development, launched by the King in 2005, is a \$1.2 billion program designed to generate employment, combat poverty, and improve infrastructure, with a special focus on rural areas. The king's continuous personal attention to development efforts received prominent coverage throughout the year. The GOM also recognizes that its economic development and reform efforts depend on a sufficiently educated and trained work force and has adopted several high-priority efforts to overhaul primary, secondary, and university curricula to better prepare Morocco's youth for the future.

¶12. (U) Legal Reforms: Moroccan efforts to combat terrorism were overhauled after the coordinated suicide bombings in Casablanca in May 2003. Following the attacks, Morocco passed laws to broaden the definition of terrorism, proposed heavy sentences for inciting terrorism, and increased investigative authorities, powers against suspected terrorists. (Note: Some human rights groups say the measures infringe on human rights, according to the media.)

¶13. (U) In 2008, Morocco implemented elements of a comprehensive anti-money-laundering bill passed in May of last year that provides the legal basis for the monitoring, investigation, and prosecution of illegal financial activities. The new laws also allow for freezing suspect accounts and permit the prosecution of terrorist finance related crimes. The law also calls for the establishment of a Financial Intelligence Unit, which may become operational in 2009. Both U.S. and EU programs are providing Moroccan police, customs, central bank, and government financial officials with training to recognize money-laundering methodologies. Morocco has a relatively effective system for disseminating U.S. Government and UN Security Council Resolution terrorist freeze lists to its financial sector and legal authorities. Morocco has provided timely reports requested by the UN Sanctions Committee and, as a result, has frozen some terrorist-related accounts.

¶14. (U) Human Rights and Transparency: The GOM has emphasized adherence to human rights standards and increased law enforcement transparency as part of its CT approach. The GOM grants non-governmental organizations unprecedented access to prisons where individuals convicted of terrorism-related crimes were being held. CT investigations and arrests appeared to be better targeted and legal proceedings more transparent throughout the year. The GOM has made firm public commitments that the struggle against terrorism will not be used to deprive individuals of their

RABAT 00001180 004.2 OF 005

rights. Terrorist suspects, and even convicts, like others, appear to be generally accorded rights and due process of law.

¶15. (U) Legal Prosecutions: Moroccan laws have been effective in leading to numerous convictions and the upholding of convictions of multiple terrorism-related cases in 2008. For example, in January, 50 defendants in the sensational 2007 Anwar al-Mehdi terror conspiracy trial were convicted and sentenced to prison. Alleged mastermind Hassan al-Khattab received a 25-year sentence. Forty-nine others, including four women and several members of the security

forces, received sentences of two to ten years. In November, the appeals court in Sale upheld the life sentence handed down last October of would-be suicide bomber Hicham Doukkali, who was wounded in August 2007 when his booby-trapped butane canister exploded in the central city of Meknes. In June, a court convicted 29 men belonging to a terrorist group known as the "Tetouan Cell," after its northern Moroccan town of origin, for plotting terrorist attacks. An appeals court also upheld the prison sentences, ranging from two to six years, of members of the terrorist group "Jamaat al Mouslimoun al Joudoud," who were arrested in 2005 on terrorism-related charges.

¶16. (U) Prison Conditions: Following the mass escape in March of eight Salafist prisoners, and concerned the Moroccan prisons were serving as a place of radical fundamentalist networking and plotting, the GOM in April 2008 created a new ministerial-level Directorate General of Prison Affairs, separating it from the Ministry of Justice. By the end of the year, all but one of the escapees had been recaptured. One was arrested in and returned from Algeria, according to press. In mid-November, the government announced the authorization of a \$27.5 million emergency program, on top of an existing \$81.5 million investment budget, designed to improve prison conditions and alleviate overcrowding. In addition to providing for the construction of six new penitentiaries, the program dedicates funds toward the government strategy of making new and existing penitentiaries spaces for reeducation and social reintegration into society. In addition, in November 2008, Moroccan law enforcement entities initiated an unprecedented series of meetings with Salafist detainees with the goal of decreasing prison conflicts and violent recidivism, and improving prisoner treatment.

¶17. (U) Counterterrorism Cooperation: Another key to Morocco's CT success has been its emphasis on international cooperation. The U.S. and Morocco built a valuable relationship based on cooperation, an ongoing exchange of information, and training. Moroccan authorities continue to disrupt plots to attack Moroccan, U.S. and other Western-affiliated targets, and aggressively investigate numerous individuals associated with international terrorist groups. The GOM has also continued to accept returnees from the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay (GITMO) and prosecute them under Moroccan law. In mid-November, for example, a Moroccan appeals court sentenced former GITMO detainee Said Boujaidia to ten years in prison on charges of conspiracy, sabotage, financing and participating in a criminal gang, among others, according to the press.

¶18. (U) Morocco has also forged solid cooperative relationships with European and African partners such as Spain, France, and the United Kingdom with which it shares information and conducts joint operations. Morocco is considered a Mediterranean Partner of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Morocco also works closely with African partners such as Mauritania and Senegal and is striving to improve its less robust relationship with Algeria, a dynamic sometimes complicated by political differences, according to the Moroccan authorities. The GOM uses army and Ministry of Interior paramilitary forces to secure its borders as best it can but faces resource constraints and a vast border area. The GOM removed and prosecuted several corrupt border officers suspected this year of accepting bribes to allow AQIM members to infiltrate Morocco, according to the press.

-- In the wake of an AQIM attack that killed 12 Mauritanian soldiers in the region of Tourine in mid-September, the GOM sent military advisors to Mauritania to provide the government with training and advice on the protection of military bases and patrolling techniques, according to the press.

¶19. (U) Outlook: In the coming year, there are several



reasons to be cautiously optimistic about the overall amelioration of the terrorism threat in Morocco but dangers remain. In addition to the GOM,s continued prosecution of its CT and counter-radicalization efforts, the population remains highly sensitized to the danger and remains the greatest bulwark against terrorism, as evidenced by the rapid denunciation and recapture of most Kenitra prison escapees. The anticipated draw down of U.S. forces in Iraq may discourage radicalization among Moroccans, but amelioration of tensions in Iraq may also result in the return of Moroccan jihadists from Iraq to Morocco with possibly violent results. The anticipated world economic downturn is also likely to make for more difficult economic times in Morocco, increasing desperation. Diminished tourism and remittance income may present the GOM with confronting increased poverty and unemployment, conditions that appear to have aided fundamentalist recruitment in the past.

120. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

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